### 'Health Information Exchange' In States

### Improving Health Care for All Americans



To better track and securely share patients' complete medical histories, more and more health care providers are participating in health information exchange (HIE) so that they can better communicate vital medical information electronically. HIE helps facilitate more coordinated patient care, reduce duplicative treatments and avoid costly mistakes.

This practice is growing among health providers because the need for HIE is clear and the benefits are significant. Despite the widespread availability of secure electronic data transfer, most Americans' medical information is stored on paper—in filing cabinets at various medical offices, clinics, laboratories and hospitals, or in boxes and folders in patients' homes. When that medical information is shared between providers, it happens by mail, fax or—most likely—by patients themselves, who frequently carry their records from appointment to appointment.

Without a secure method of sharing this medical information, seemingly small details that can have a big effect on care can be overlooked, leaving each provider with an incomplete picture of the patient's health. For example, with incomplete medical information, a provider may order tests and screenings that the patient has already received elsewhere, or may unknowingly write prescriptions for medications that may interfere with what another provider has prescribed.

Electronic health information systems can help prevent these errors by ensuring that everyone involved in a patient's care—whether in a primary care setting, a specialists' office or emergency department—has access to the same information. HIE also encourages efficient care by enabling automatic appointment reminders or follow-up instructions to be sent directly to patients, and prescriptions directly to pharmacies. HIE reduces the amount of time patients spend filling out paperwork and briefing their providers on their medical history, allowing more time for discussions about health concerns and treatments. And by saving time for patients and providers along the entire continuum of health care delivery, HIE has the potential to both reduce costs and improve health outcomes.



### What is happening in YOUR state?

Every state has received funds to modernize how patient health information is shared. More information about the State Health Information Exchange program—including what's happening in each state—is available at www.healthIT.gov.

#### **The State Health Information Exchange Program**

In recognition of the potential of HIE, Congress allocated funding under the State Health Information Exchange Program to jumpstart this transition to better care. The State HIE Program aims to provide the resources, support and a learning network of peers to help states make the electronic sharing of health information a reality for health care providers and patients.

This unprecedented effort to modernize the way health care providers share important patient information is administered by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC), part of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

HHS awarded grants to government entities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and five U.S. territories, including American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands to help develop local health information exchange programs. Some currently operate HIE programs community-wide; others are taking initial steps toward HIE. Ultimately, the long-term goal is nationwide health information exchange.

#### What's Next?

States are now working to ensure that local health care providers have options to electronically generate and transmit prescriptions, receive lab reports and share summaries of patient care with other medical professionals. Additionally, HHS is incentivizing the "meaningful use" of certified electronic health information sharing to achieve health and efficiency goals. Over the next few years, eligible health care professionals and hospitals can qualify for Medicare and Medicaid incentive payments when they adopt certified electronic health information technology and use it to achieve specified objectives.

While much work remains for HIE, significant progress has been made across all states toward bringing health and medical records into the digital age. To find out more about the State HIE Program, visit www.healthlT.gov.

The secure and efficient transfer of patients' medical information is beneficial for everyone:

## What Health Information Exchange Means for **Patients**

If your doctor and specialists have electronic access to your medical information before you arrive in their office, you will benefit from:

- ✓ Better communication, increased patient safety and higher-quality care;
- More time for you and your doctor to talk about your health, any conditions you might have and what treatments might work best for you.

### What Health Information Exchange Means for Health Care Providers

Sharing updated, electronic patient information with other providers enables you to:

- Access and confidentially share patients' vital medical history, no matter where your patients are receiving care—specialists' offices, labs or emergency rooms;
- ✓ Provide safer, more effective care tailored to your patients' unique medical needs.

# What Health Information Exchange Means for **Policymakers**

Higher-quality, more efficient health care through health information exchange helps to:

- ✓ Reduce medical errors and improve appropriateness of treatments delivered;
- Create a more cost-effective health care system with less waste.